
VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
AND TRAINING IN EUROPE

ESTONIA





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This VET in Europe report is part of a series prepared by Cedefop's ReferNet network. VET in Europe reports provide an overview of national vocational education and training (VET) systems of the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway. The reports help to understand VET's main features and role within countries' overall education and training systems from a lifelong learning perspective, and VET's relevance to and interaction with the labour market.

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CHAPTER 1.

External factors influencing VET

1.1. Demographics

Estonia's population is 1 315 635 (2017) ⁽¹⁾. Its area of 45 277 km² comprises 15 counties, 15 towns, and 69 rural municipalities ⁽²⁾. The population is decreasing due to negative natural growth and migration.

In 2016, the number of deaths exceeded the number of births by about 1 339, but there was a small increase in the number of births compared with the three previous years. A total of 14 822 persons (1.12% of the total population) came to Estonia (mostly Estonians returning from abroad, but also other country nationals) and 13 792 (1.04%) left to Finland (58%), the UK (9%) and other destinations (Statistics Estonia, 2017a). Positive net migration still has a minor impact on education.

The country is multicultural and has a bilingual community. In April 2018, about 69% of the population was Estonian ⁽³⁾. Most VET institutions teach in Estonian, though there are schools where they use Russian or both Estonian and Russian.

As in many other European Union (EU) countries, the population is ageing. The working-age population (aged 20–64) is projected to decline by 43 000 people by 2025. With the acceleration of economic growth, the employment rate has grown in recent years, which has exceeded the target set by the *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* ⁽⁴⁾. By 2060, there will be one working age person for every retired person. This is 3.5 times less than in 2015 (Figure 1).

Demographic changes have an impact on vocational education and training (VET). Participation has been decreasing since 2010/11 due to the low birth rate in the second half of the 1990s. This has led to the rearrangement of the VET institutions network. The number of state-owned VET providers has been reduced from 54 in 2002/03 to 26 in 2017/18. To increase the quality and efficiency of VET, many small providers were merged into regional VET centres offering a wide range of qualifications. Adjustments will continue in line with demographic trends.

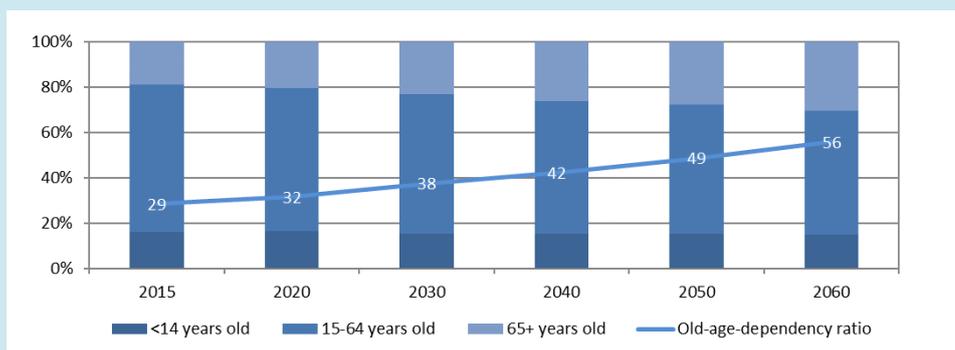
⁽¹⁾ Eurostat: *demo_gind* [extracted on 23.4.2018].

⁽²⁾ Ministry of Finance: *Kohalikud omavalitsused [local authorities]*: <http://www.fin.ee/kov>

⁽³⁾ Statistics Estonia: *Statistical database*: <http://andmebaas.stat.ee/Index.aspx?lang=en>

⁽⁴⁾ OSKA report “*Eesti tööturg täna ja homme*” [*Estonian labour market today and tomorrow*]: <http://oska.kutsekoda.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Eesti-tööturg-täna-ja-homme2017.pdf>

Figure 1. Population forecast by age group and old-age-dependency ratio



Source: Eurostat, proj_15ndbims [extracted on 29.5.2018].

1.2. Economy and labour market indicators

Most companies are micro and/or small-sized. A limited number of occupations/professions are regulated and the labour market is considered flexible. VET qualifications are required in the main economic sectors of:

- a) information and communications;
- b) electronics and components;
- c) machinery and metalworking;
- d) transport and logistics;
- e) timber and furniture ⁽⁵⁾.

Export comprises primarily of electronic equipment, machinery and equipment, mineral products, metals and metal products, timber and wood products, food and transport vehicles, agricultural products and food preparations. The main export destination countries are Sweden (18%), Finland (16%) and Latvia (9%) (Statistics Estonia, 2017b).

The government is encouraging more working age people to remain economically active. **Reform since 2016** has been supporting individuals with reduced working ability in finding suitable employment. Another reform is supporting the creation of childcare services, so parents can return to the labour market earlier. This increases labour force participation.

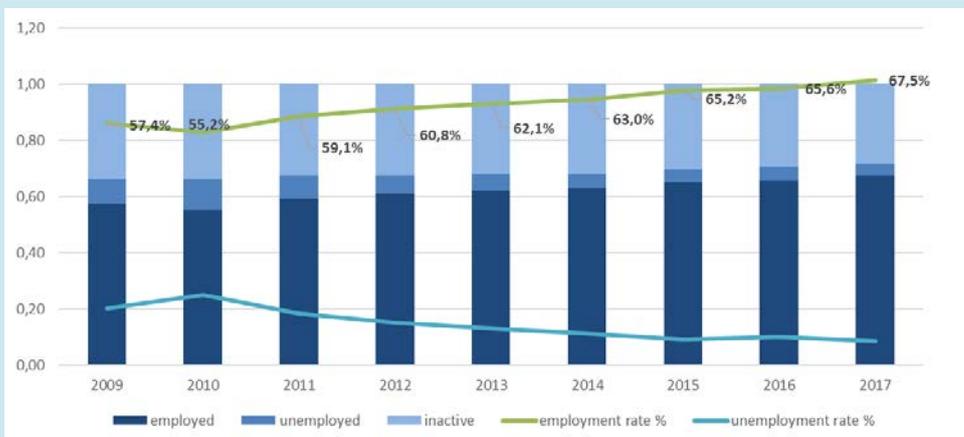
The employment rate has been recovering quickly since the economic crisis (the increase was 3.9 percentage points in 2011 compared with 2010), but its rise was notably slower in 2014 (0.9 percentage points less compared with 2013). In 2017, the employment rate of 15 to 74 year-olds was 67.5%.

Unemployment has decreased since 2010, reaching 5.8% in 2017. This is below the EU average. Labour market indicators improved in 2017, almost throughout the entire year. The participation rate in the workforce increased by 1.2% and the employment rate by 1.9 percentage points. The unemployment rate fell by 1 percentage point ⁽⁶⁾.

⁽⁵⁾ Enterprise Estonia: *Trade with Estonia*: <https://www.tradewithestonia.com/estonian/doing-business-in-estonia>

⁽⁶⁾ Statistics Estonia: *Statistical database. Press release no. 17, 14 February 2018*. <https://www.stat.ee/pressiteade-2018-017>

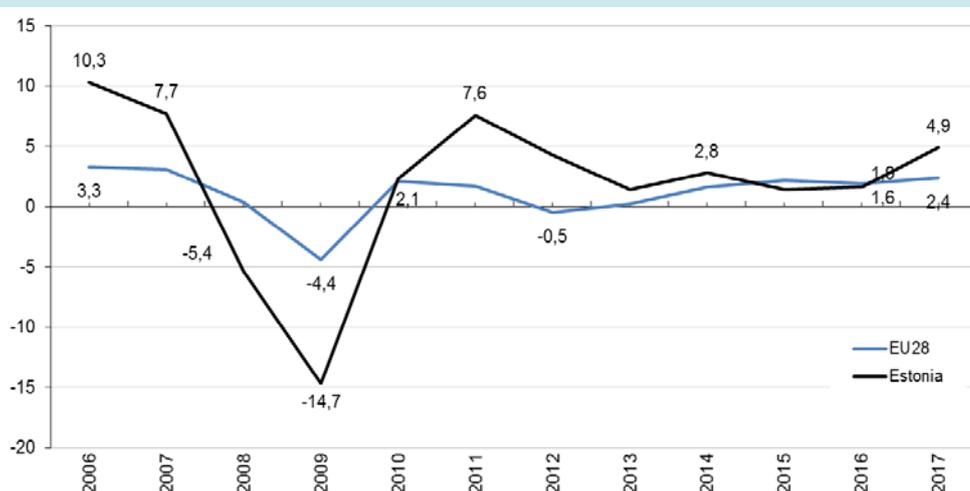
Figure 2. Employed, unemployed and inactive population (aged 15-74) in 2009-17 (millions)



Source: Statistics Estonia, 2018 [extracted on 18.4.2018].

Unemployment decline is likely to be linked to economic growth: in 2017, Estonia's economic growth was the fastest in five years. The Estonian GDP increased by 4.9% in 2017, compared to 2016 ⁽⁷⁾.

Figure 3. Real GDP growth compared to the previous year



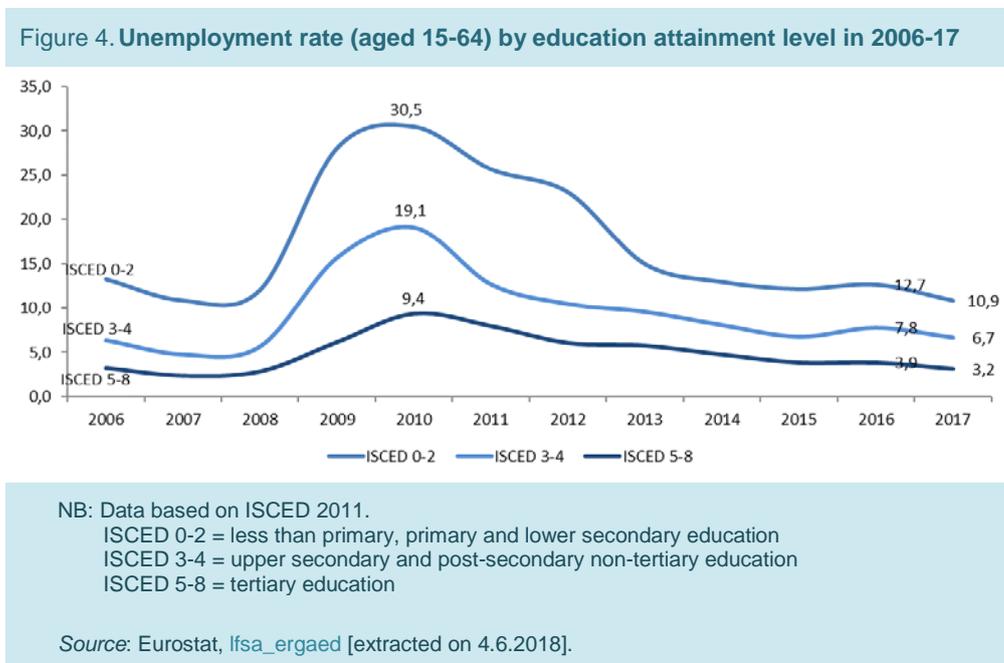
Source: Eurostat, tec00115 [extracted on 18.4.2018].

As demonstrated in Figure 4, unemployment is distributed unevenly between those with low- and high-level qualifications. The gap increased during the crisis, as unskilled workers are more vulnerable to unemployment. Compared to 2007, unemployment rates are higher in all

⁽⁷⁾ Statistics Estonia: *Statistical database. Press release no. 21, 23 April 2018.* <https://www.stat.ee/pressiteade-2018-021>

groups; since 2008, the unemployment rate of people with the lowest level of qualification has started to increase faster.

Since 2011, the unemployment rate has decreased on the whole, but is still the highest in the group of unskilled workers.

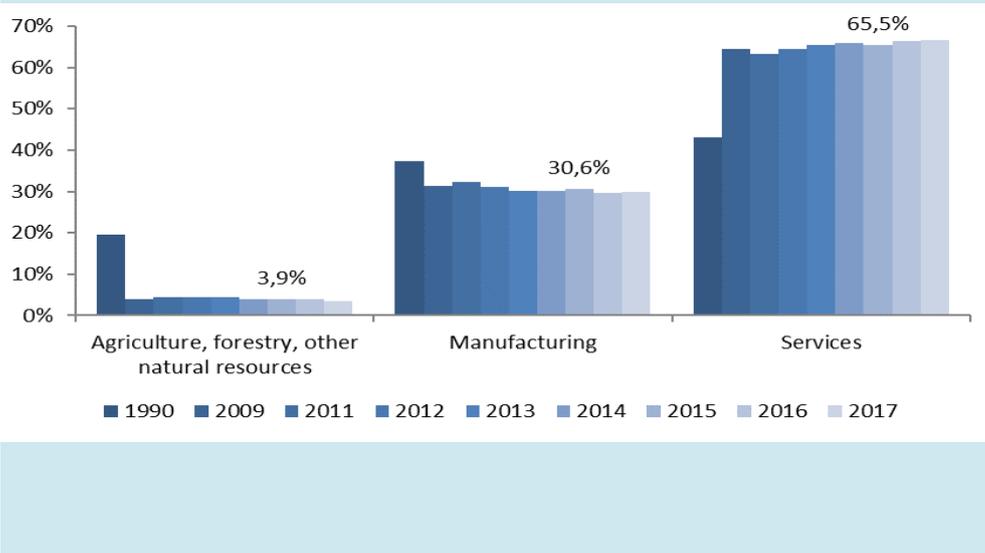


The employment rate of recent VET graduates increased from 79.3% in 2014 to 81.3% in 2017 ⁽⁸⁾. In 2017, 66.6% of employment was in services and 29.8% in industry (Figure 5). The primary economic sector ⁽⁹⁾ share was 3.5%. In the 1990s and 2000s, the services sector expanded significantly, employing more people in accommodation and food services, professional, scientific and technical activities, wholesale and retail trade, as well as arts, entertainment and recreation. Employment in manufacturing has decreased slightly, mainly in construction and energy production. Since 2009, the balance between sectors has remained relatively stable.

⁽⁸⁾ 20 to 34 year-olds who graduated from upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary VET (ISCED levels 3 and 4) (Eurostat [edat_lfse_24](#), extracted on 23.4.2018).

⁽⁹⁾ The primary sector of the economy makes direct use of natural resources.

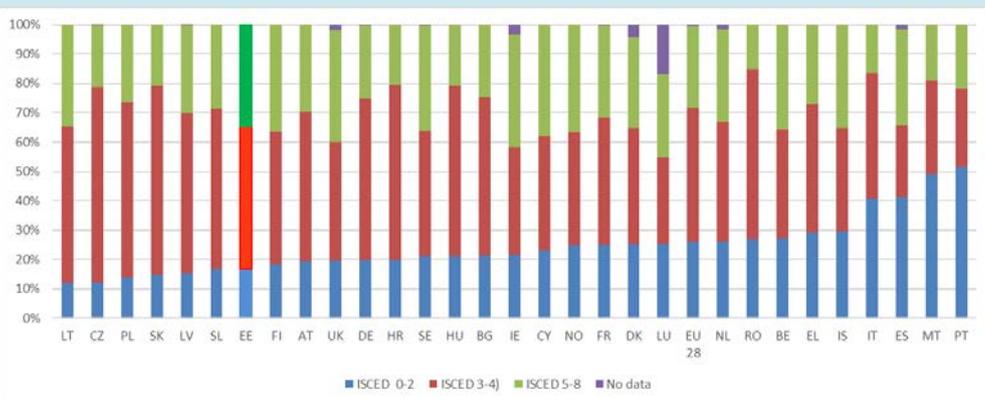
Figure 5. Employment by economic sector in 1990-2017 (aged 15 and above, % of total employment)



1.3. Educational attainment

Education traditionally has high value in Estonia. For many years, the share of the population aged up to 64 with higher education (34%) has been higher in Estonia than in most EU Member States. The share of those with low or without a qualification is the seventh lowest in the EU, following the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia, Poland, Latvia and Slovenia (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Population (aged 15 to 64) by highest education level attained in 2017



NB: Data based on ISCED 2011.

ISCED 0-2 = less than primary, primary and lower secondary education

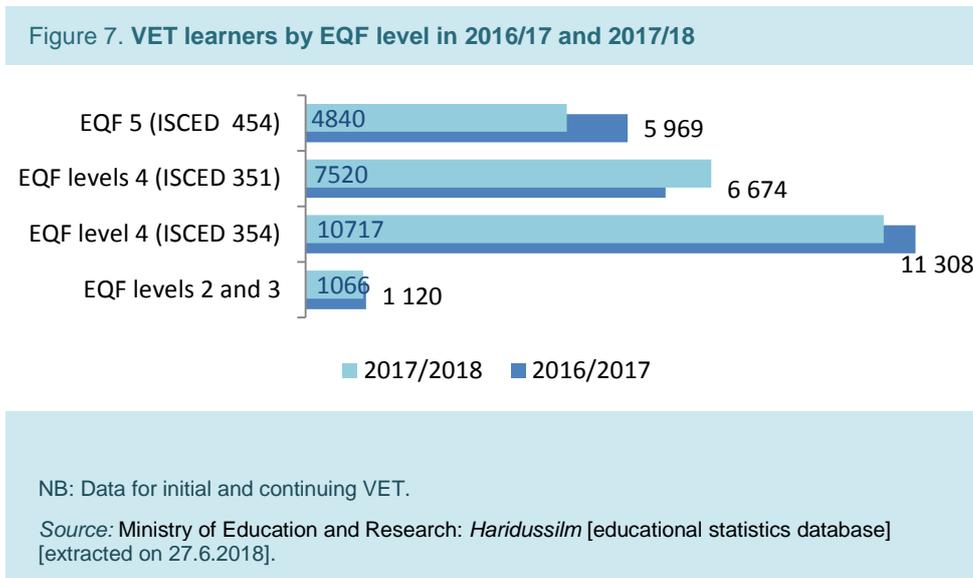
ISCED 3-4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education

ISCED 5-8 = tertiary education

Source: Eurostat, *lfsa_pgaed* [extracted on 4.6.2018].

In 2017/18, there were 24 143 VET learners. At the upper secondary level (EQF 4), there are two types of programmes – ISCED 354 programmes that provide upper secondary education as well as access to higher education, and ISCED 351 programmes that do not allow

the continuation of studies at a higher education level (Figure 7). Only ISCED 354 programmes are considered upper secondary VET in a national context.



Traditionally, there are more males in VET (53%) ⁽¹⁰⁾, except at the post-secondary level. Males prefer engineering (the most popular option), manufacturing and construction, ICT, and services programmes, while females more often enrol in services (the most popular option), business and administration, production and processing, and arts ⁽¹¹⁾.

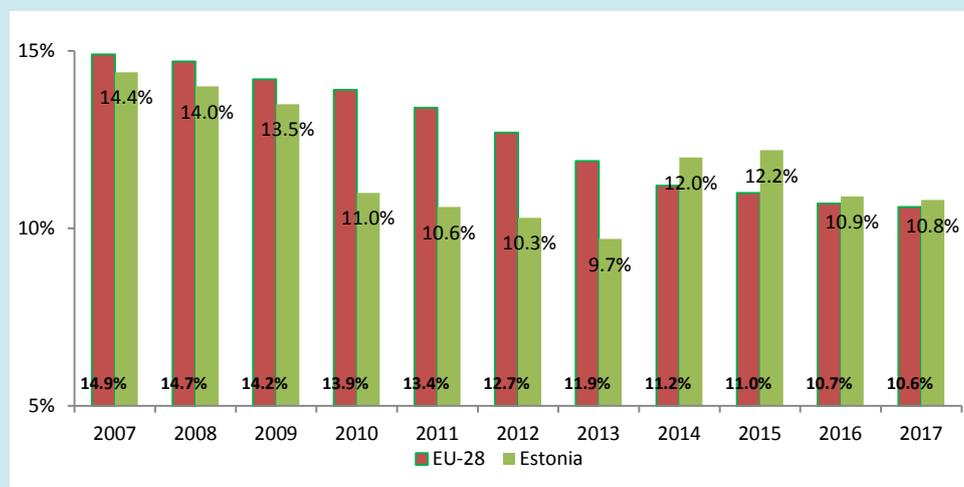
The share of early leavers from education and training has decreased from 14.4% in 2007 to 10.8% in 2017 (Figure 8). The national objective for 2020 is 9.5% or less (Government Office, 2017), achieving this goal is problematic if we look at the developments in recent years.

⁽¹⁰⁾) Source: Ministry of Education and Research: *Haridussilm* [educational statistics database] <http://www.haridussilm.ee/>

⁽¹¹⁾) Source: Ministry of Education and Research: *Haridussilm* [educational statistics database] <http://www.haridussilm.ee/>

Figure 8. Early leavers from education and training in 2007-17

NB: Share of the population aged 18 to 24 with at most lower-secondary education and not in further education or training.



Source: Eurostat, *tesem020* [extracted on 29.5.2018].

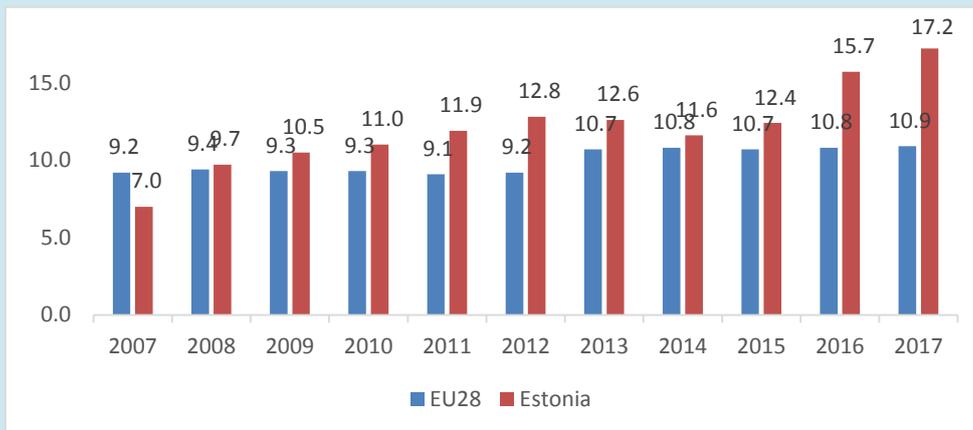
Despite recent positive developments, the dropout rate ⁽¹²⁾ from VET during a school year is high (19.5% in 2016/17). The risk of dropping out is the highest in the first school year and the challenge for VET providers is to keep the most vulnerable learners in VET programmes; those who had low grades in basic education ⁽¹³⁾ and may not have had a positive learning experience or not developed study habits are examples. Dropout rates also vary by region, school and curriculum group. In vocational secondary education, the dropout rate has decreased for three consecutive years due to the increasingly targeted activity of educational institutions.

Lifelong learning offers training opportunities for adults, including early leavers from education (Figure 9).

⁽¹²⁾ Measured on 10 November each year; excludes those who: attended classes less than 31 days, were readmitted within 31 days, applied but never attended or who changed programme in the same curriculum group and in the same institution.

⁽¹³⁾ See Chapter 2 for the information on education levels.

Figure 9. Participation in lifelong learning in 2005-17

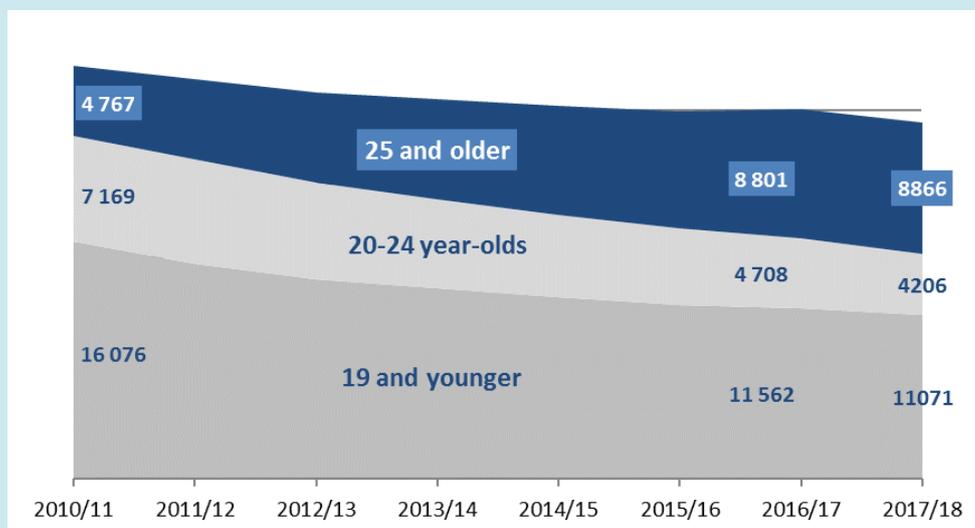


NB: Share of adult population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training.

Source: Eurostat, *trng_lfse_01* [extracted on 23.4.2018].

Participation in lifelong learning in Estonia has been increasing in the past decade. In 2017, it reached 17.2%, more than six percentage points above the EU-28 average. The government has set the 2020 goal of 20% and VET has been playing an increasing role in achieving this goal (Figure 10).

Figure 10. VET learners by age



Source: Ministry of Education and Research: *Haridussilm* [educational statistics database] [extracted on 24.4.2018].

The share of adults (aged 25 and above) in initial and continuing VET has been increasing. It has more than doubled since 2010/11 and reached 36.7% of the total VET population in 2017/18 (Section 2.2.6). This reflects demographic trends and the changing needs of the labour market, but also the changing attitudes towards lifelong learning.

1.4. Employment policies influencing VET

The number of regulated professions in Estonia is relatively low ⁽¹⁴⁾. The labour market is flexible and employers do not often require formal qualifications.

Economic and welfare growth, social cohesion, and increasing national security are priorities of the current government. Along with addressing demographic challenges and emigration, employability measures include: flexible parental leave to support the employment of those with children; updating employment legislation to serve new work forms; and support for youth employment by creating additional incentives for employers and by decreasing limitations imposed on youth employment; for example, the employment of minors.

Some measures have already been approved by parliament (*Riigikogu*), such as legislation amendments that support the attraction of highly qualified foreigners to Estonia by simplifying procedures for obtaining a residence permit. This helps to attract foreign investment and workforce and also has an impact on VET.

Activation policy measures target the unemployed and inactive. They include job-search assistance, career guidance and counselling, upskilling and retraining, and traineeships. A contribution-based unemployment insurance scheme is part of the system supporting the unemployed.

The work ability reform (2016) offers an extensive package of needs-based services, including protected employment, peer support, working with a support person, work rehabilitation, and the provision of assistive work equipment. There are also services and subsidies for employers of people with reduced working ability. All services are administered by the public employment service ⁽¹⁵⁾.

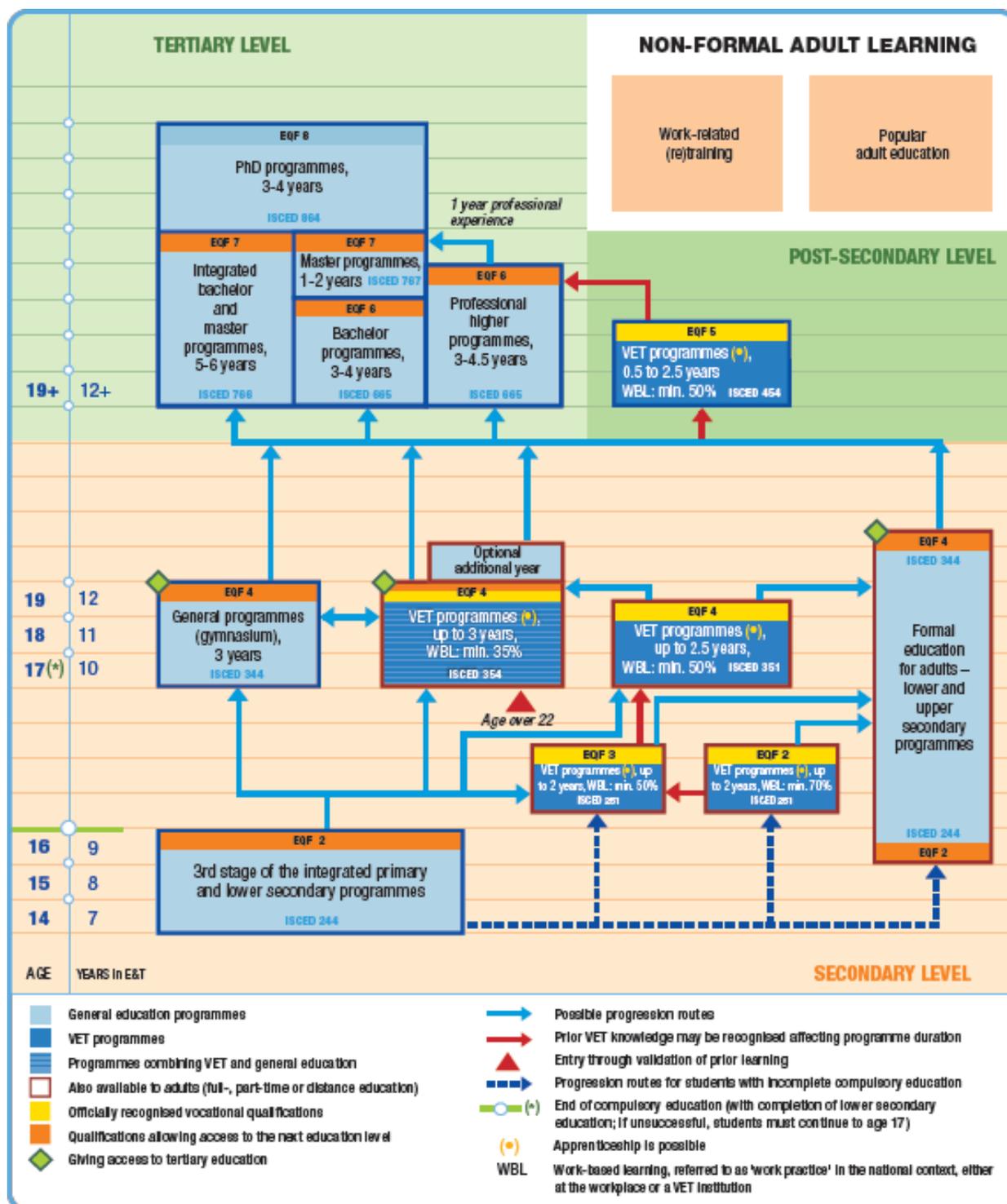
⁽¹⁴⁾ Compared with Central European countries, European Commission: Growth, European single market: *Database of regulated professions*: https://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/services/free-movement-professionals/regulated-professions-database_en

⁽¹⁵⁾ Unemployment Insurance Fund.

CHAPTER 2.

Provision of VET

Figure 11. VET in the Estonian education and training system in 2018



N.B.: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Estonia

2.1. Introduction

The Education Act (Parliament, 1992) establishes the organisation and principles of the Estonian education system. The system is decentralised and, due to its relatively small size, flexible. Responsibilities are clearly divided between the state, local governments and schools. National curricula are based on learning outcomes, and teachers can choose teaching methods and materials.

Education is under the remit of the Ministry of Education and Research (*Haridus- ja Teadusministeerium*). The *Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020* (MoER et al., 2014) guides the most important developments in all education sectors, including vocational education and training (VET).

Education system data are collected in the [Estonian education information system](#). This has information on education providers, learners, teaching staff, curricula, and diplomas. The visual educational statistics database *HaridusSilm* allows the comparison of schools according to selected indicators.

The education and training system comprises of:

- (a) pre-school education (ISCED level 0);
- (b) integrated primary and lower secondary education (ISCED levels 1 and 2, EQF 2) (hereafter basic education);
- (c) upper secondary education (ISCED level 3, EQF 4);
- (d) post-secondary, non-tertiary education (ISCED level 4, EQF 5);
- (e) higher education (ISCED levels 6, 7 and 8, EQF 6, 7 and 8).

Pre-school education is not compulsory and is generally provided at childcare institutions (*koolieelne lasteasutus*) for one-and-a-half to seven-year-old learners. Compulsory education starts at age seven and includes nine years of basic education or until a learner reaches age 17. While primary and lower secondary education are usually offered together in basic schools, primary education (grades 1 to 6) can also be offered in separate schools, usually in rural areas to ensure better accessibility for learners.

General upper secondary education is provided by upper secondary schools (*gümnaasium*). This three-year programme gives graduates access to higher education, provided through academic and professional programmes. Professional higher education institutions may also provide post-secondary VET programmes along with higher education.

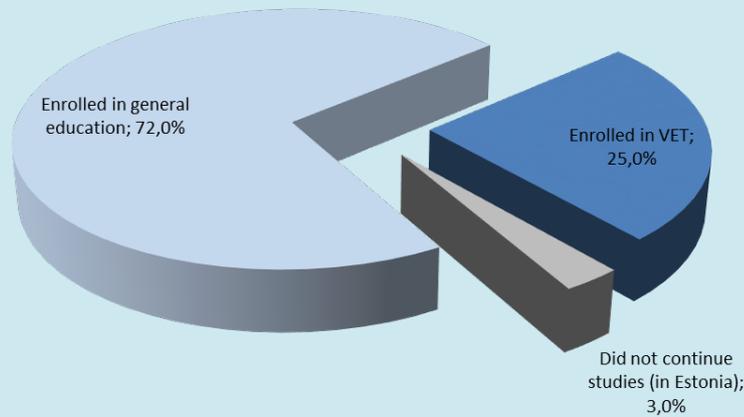
Most VET is provided at upper secondary and post-secondary levels (at EQF levels 4 and 5). VET programmes are also available for learners who are without a completed basic education (EQF levels 2 and 3). However, participation at lower levels is marginal.

There are no age restrictions for enrolment in post-secondary and higher education as long as the learner has the qualification giving access to the selected programme. There is a trend for more adult learners to participate in initial and continuing VET (Section 2.2.6).

Almost 80% of VET schools are owned by the state. There are also private and municipal VET schools.

In 2017, 72% of basic education graduates pursued general upper secondary education and 25% continued in VET the following school year. The goal for 2020 is 35% (MoER, 2014).

Figure 12. Basic education graduate choices in 2017



NB: In the same calendar year as graduation.

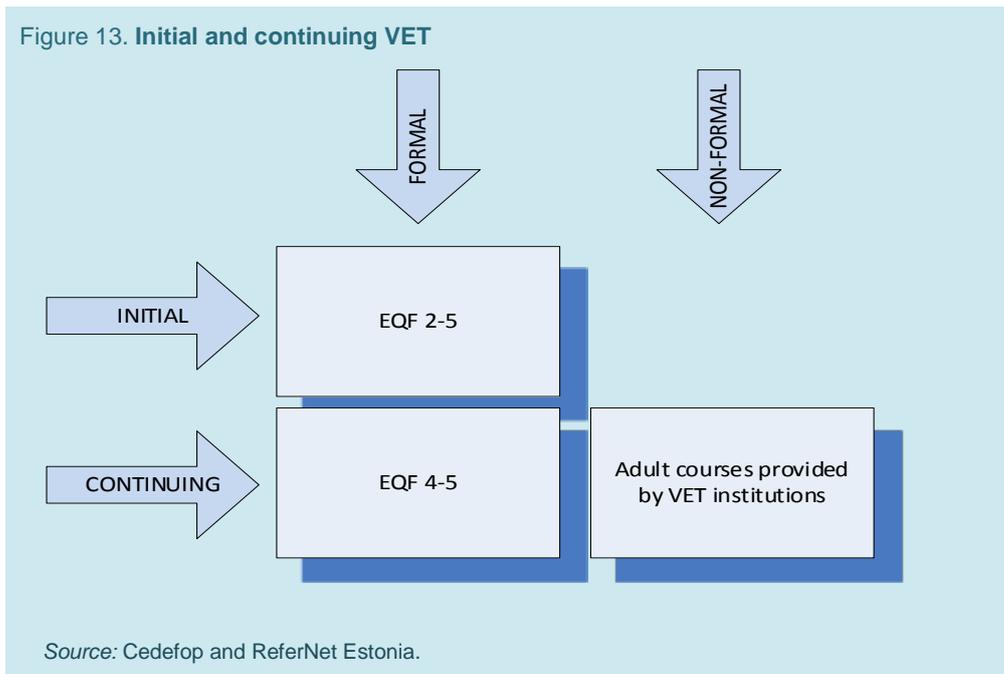
Source: Ministry of Education and Research: *Haridussilm* [educational statistics database] [extracted on 24.4.18].

This distribution has not changed significantly since 2010. Approximately 10% of general upper secondary school graduates continue in VET. There are gender and regional (including linguistic) differences in the education choices of basic school graduates. While only 10% of females in cities, having studied in Estonian, choose VET, the share increases to 60% for males in the north-eastern part of the country whose language of instruction is Russian. Of the learners who have not achieved the B1 level in Estonian by the end of basic school, two thirds have continued in VET in the past six years.

2.2. Government-regulated VET provision

The Vocational Educational Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013) distinguishes between initial and continuing VET.

Figure 13. Initial and continuing VET



While both types provide the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to enter the labour market, initial VET also gives learners access to the next qualification level. Upper secondary VET gives access to the higher education programmes. Non-formal continuing VET is part of adult learning regulated by the Adult Education Act (Parliament, 2015) (Section 2.4).

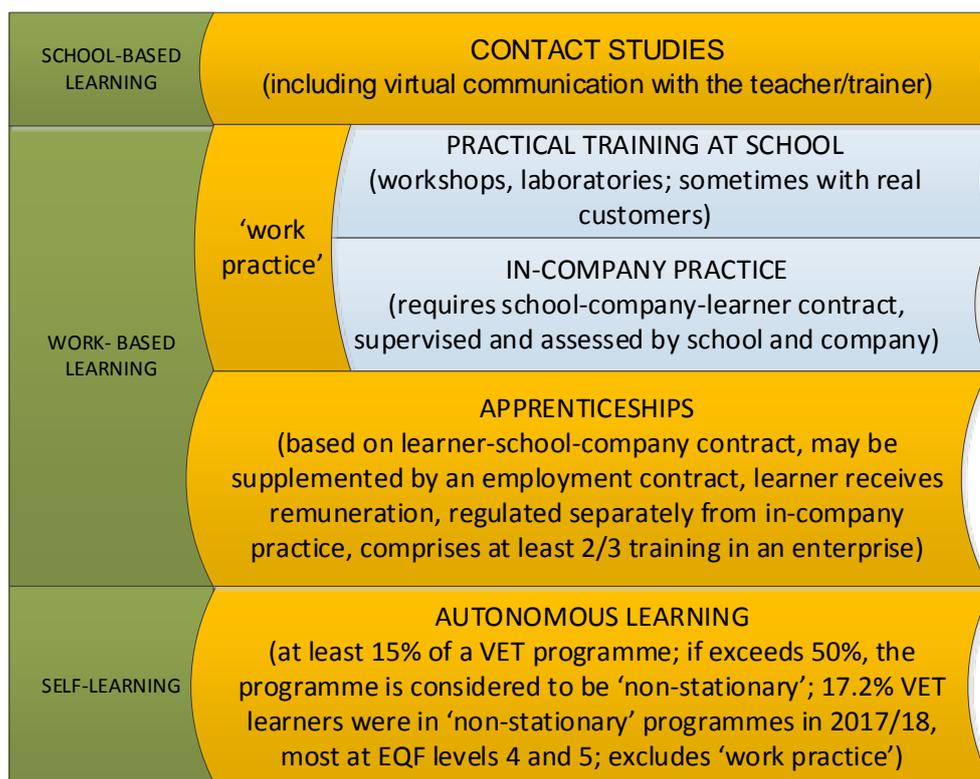
Formal VET leads to four qualification levels (2 to 5) that are the same as in the European qualifications framework (EQF). The VET standard specifies the volume (number of credits), learning outcomes, and the conditions for termination and continuation of studies for each VET type (Government, 2013).

There are several VET learning options:

- (a) school-based learning (contact studies, including virtual communication with the teacher/trainer);
- (b) work practice (practical training at school and in-company practice);
- (c) self-learning (excludes work practice; at least 15% of a programme should be acquired through autonomous learning; if it exceeds 50%, the programme is considered to be 'non-stationary'; 17.2% of VET learners were in 'non-stationary' programmes in 2017/18, mostly at EQF levels 4 and 5).

Apprenticeships were introduced to VET as a stand-alone study form in 2006 (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Learning options in VET



Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Estonia.

Upper secondary VET learners receive two qualifications simultaneously: a formal education qualification awarded after the completion of the upper secondary VET programme, and a professional qualification verifying the learning outcomes for a specific occupation or profession (Cedefop, 2017). To complete a VET programme, learners need to pass a professional qualification examination that can also be replaced by a final examination if a professional qualification examination is not available. Both examinations are learning outcomes based and usually include a practical part. Upper secondary VET students and students with special needs can complete their studies by passing the school-organised final examination if they were not successful in passing a national professional qualification examination.

In addition to VET examinations, state examinations (mother tongue, mathematics and foreign language) are optional for upper secondary VET graduates. These exams are organised centrally by the Foundation Innove ⁽¹⁶⁾.

2.2.1. Initial VET programmes leading to EQF level 2 (ISCED 251)

These programmes lead to EQF level 2 (*teise taseme kutseõpe*, ISCED 251) qualification and prepare for elementary occupations, such as cleaner assistant, assistant gardener, electronics assembly operator, or logger ⁽¹⁷⁾. There are no minimum entry requirements, but learners must be at least 17 years old to enrol.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Innove: *State examinations*: <https://www.innove.ee/en/examinations-and-tests/state-examinations/>

⁽¹⁷⁾ As described in ILO: international standard classification of occupations: ISCO 08, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/>

The volume of studies is 15 to 120 credits ⁽¹⁸⁾ depending on the programme: the cleaner assistant programme is 15 credits while assistant gardener is 120. The share of work practice (practical training at school, in-company practice) is at least 70%. Many curricula at this level, for example for cleaner assistants, are also suitable for learners with special educational needs, e.g. for students with moderate and severe disabilities. Special arrangements are available for them in VET schools and social welfare institutions.

Those who complete VET can enter the labour market or continue their studies at EQF level 3 or in general education schools for adults leading to general basic education. Those who had been simultaneously enrolled in general education and meet basic education requirements are issued with a basic education certificate by general education schools in addition to a VET qualification. Less than one percent (113) of VET learners were enrolled in these programmes in 2017/18.

2.2.2. Initial VET programmes leading to EQF level 3 (ISCED 251)

These programmes lead to EQF level 3 qualifications (*kolmanda taseme kutseõpe*, ISCED 251) and prepare for occupations such as woodworking bench operator and electronic equipment assembler. Completed basic education is not required to enrol in these programmes. The volume of studies is 15 to 120 credits and the share of work practice (practical training at school, in-company practice) is at least 50%; usually half of it takes place at a VET institution and the other half at an enterprise. Graduates can enter the labour market. Similar to programmes leading to EQF level 2, those who acquired basic (general) education (before or in parallel to a VET programme) can continue their studies at upper secondary level; those without completed basic education can continue their studies in general education schools for adults. In 2017/18, 3.9% (953) of VET learners were enrolled in these programmes.

2.2.3. Initial and continuing VET programmes leading to EQF level 4

Two programme types are available at this level:

- (a) initial and continuing VET comprising of exclusively vocational curricula (ISCED 351) without access to the next education level unless upper secondary general education is acquired;
- (b) initial VET comprising both general education and VET modules (ISCED 354); it is the only programme type that is called 'upper secondary VET' in the national context.

2.2.3.1. Initial and continuing VET programmes (ISCED 351)

Initial VET programmes (*neljanda taseme kutseõpe*, ISCED 351) lead to qualifications at EQF level 4. Graduates can work in more complex occupations, such as welder, junior software developer, IT systems specialist, farm-worker, but the programme does not provide general education. Completed basic education is a prerequisite to enrol in these programmes. The volume of studies is 15 to 150 credits (depending on the programme) and 180 credits for music and performance programmes. The share of work practice (practical training at school, in-

⁽¹⁸⁾ The Vocational Educational Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013) defines credits for VET curricula describing the time required to achieve learning outcomes. One credit is 26 hours of learner 'study load'. The number of credits per programme and school year is 60.

company practice) is at least 50%, half of which takes place at school and half at enterprises. Graduates can enter the labour market or continue in upper secondary general education or a VET programme at ISCED level 354.

Those entering continuing VET programmes must have an EQF level 4 qualification or competences in addition to basic education to enrol. Graduates can work in occupations such as electrical network installer, men's tailor. In 2017/18, 30.9% (7 452) of VET learners were enrolled in these programmes.

2.2.3.2. *Initial upper secondary VET programmes (ISCED 354)*

These are mostly three-year initial VET programmes leading to EQF level 4 (*kutsekeskharidusõpe*, ISCED 354) qualification, such as heat pump installers and catering specialists. Upper secondary VET programmes also give graduates access to higher education, provided the entry requirements are met. Higher education institutions may require passing state examinations (mathematics, foreign language and mother tongue) in addition to VET qualifications. They are organised centrally by Foundation Innove⁽¹⁹⁾.

At the end of the programme, all graduates have to pass the professional qualification examination, upper secondary VET students and those with special needs can conclude their studies by taking a final examination, if not successful in passing the professional qualification examination.

As shown in Figure 11, an optional additional year of general education (bridging programme) is available for graduates to help prepare for state examinations. However, this option has not been widely used.

Students, aged 22 and above, may enter upper secondary VET without basic education, in the case that they demonstrate competences corresponding to basic education. Schools assess the required competences through the validation of prior learning.

The volume of studies is mostly 180 credits, including at least 60 credits of general education: 30 credits are the same for all programmes and 30 are tailored to the programme. The share of work practice (practical training at school and in-company practice) is at least 35%. In 2017/18, 44.4% of all VET learners were enrolled in these programmes; 6.5% of 2016/17 graduates continued to higher education the year following graduation.

2.2.4. **Initial and continuing VET programmes leading to EQF level 5 (ISCED 454)**

These programmes (*viienda taseme kutseõpe*, ISCED 454) lead to qualifications at EQF level 5. The share of work practice is at least 50%, half of which takes place at a VET institution and the rest at an enterprise.

Initial programmes award qualifications such as accountant, business administration specialist, sales organiser, and small business entrepreneur. The volume of the studies is 120 to 150 credits and 60 to 150 credits for military and public defence programmes. A completed upper secondary education is a prerequisite to enrol in these programmes.

To enrol in continuing programmes at this level, apart from a completed upper secondary education, learners are also required to have an EQF level 4 or 5 VET qualification or relevant

⁽¹⁹⁾ Innove: *Final examinations*: <https://www.innove.ee/en/general-education/final-examinations>

competences. The volume of such programmes is 15 to 60 credits. They offer qualifications in occupations such as tax specialist, vehicle technician, information management specialist, and farmer.

Graduates of both initial and continuing VET can enter the labour market or follow further pathways in bachelor or professional higher education studies; graduates of initial VET may also progress in continuing VET. In 2017/18, 20% of all VET learners were enrolled in EQF level 5 programmes (2.7% in continuing programmes).

2.2.5. Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships (*töökohapõhine õpe*) were introduced in 2006 (Parliament, 2013, Article 28). They can be offered at all VET levels and in all its forms (initial and continuing), and lead to qualifications at EQF levels 2 to 5. Apprenticeships follow the same curricula as school-based programmes. VET institutions cooperate with employers to design implementation plans for apprentices based on the existing curricula.

General characteristics of apprenticeship programmes are:

- (a) training in the enterprise comprises at least two thirds of the curriculum;
- (b) the remaining one third of the programme (school part) may also comprise of training at school; in some cases, schools have better equipment than companies;
- (c) the apprenticeship contract between the school, learner and employer stipulates the rights and obligations of the parties as well as the details of the learning process; the contract is usually initiated by schools, but can also be proposed by companies and learners; it should be in accordance with the labour code but learners retain student status even if an employment contract is signed in addition to the apprenticeship contract; apprentices have the same social guarantees as learners in school-based VET;
- (d) the total study duration is from three months to three and half years ⁽²⁰⁾, equal to school-based VET programmes;
- (e) employers recompense students for tasks performed to the amount agreed in the contract; it cannot be less than the national minimum wage of EUR 500 per month or EUR 2.97 per hour (2018);
- (f) apprentices have to pass the same final examinations as in school-based VET;
- (g) each apprentice is supported by two supervisors: one at school and one at the workplace.

The apprenticeship grant covers the training of supervisors and other costs ⁽²¹⁾. Within an apprentice contract, schools may transfer up to 50% of the grant to the training company to pay a salary to supervisors at the workplace.

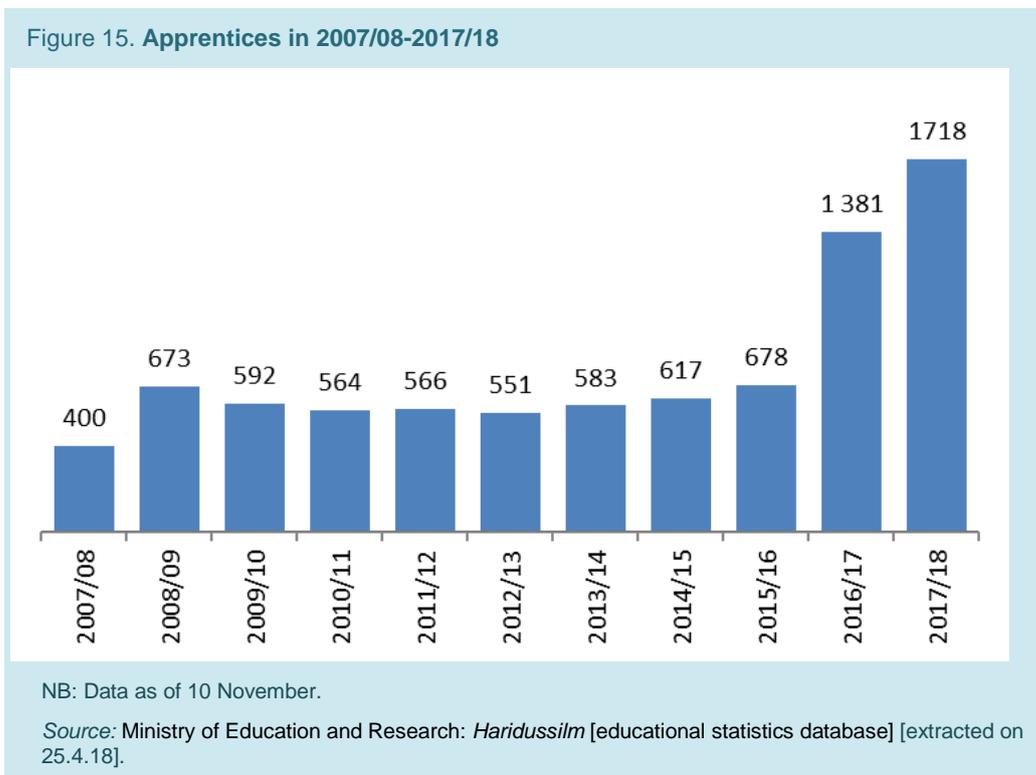
In 2015/16, there were 678 apprentices, including 30 whose studies were partly financed by the European Social Fund (ESF). In 2016/17, further ESF investment has allowed increasing the number to 1 381 (5% of VET learners), including 996 of the partly ESF-financed apprentices ⁽²²⁾. In 2017/18, there were 1 718 apprentices (Figure 15). A total of 78% of vocational education

⁽²⁰⁾ Currently, apprenticeships are not provided in upper secondary VET (ISCED 354).

⁽²¹⁾ Salaries, training materials and maintenance (such as heating and electricity).

⁽²²⁾ More partly EU-financed apprentices started training in January 2017 but they are not included in this figure.

institutions and around 400 companies offered apprenticeship training. In 2015-23, the government's intention is to attract a total of 7 200 apprentices.



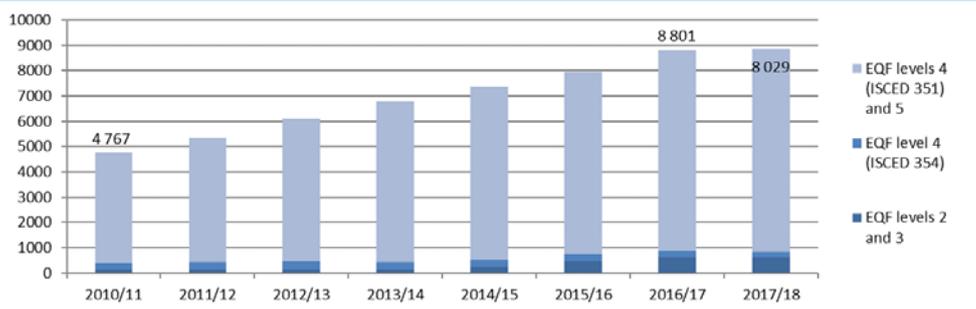
The most popular apprenticeship study fields (curriculum groups) are wholesale and retail sales, social work and counselling, hairdressing and beauty services, motor vehicles, home services, and electricity and energy. Approximately 70% of apprentices are studying in initial and continuing VET programmes leading to ESF level 4.

2.2.6. Adults in formal VET

There is no maximum age limit for enrolling in VET: adults can enrol at any level and any study form for free (Parliament, 2013). In 2016/17, the median age of newly enrolled VET learners was 21, ranging from 14 to 74.

While legislation does not specify the age of adult learners, policy overviews and analyses often refer to age 25 and above. Their share in VET has increased from 17% in 2010/11 to 37.1% in 2017/18, mainly at EQF level 4 (except ISCED 354) and 5 (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Adult learners (aged 25 and above) in formal VET by level

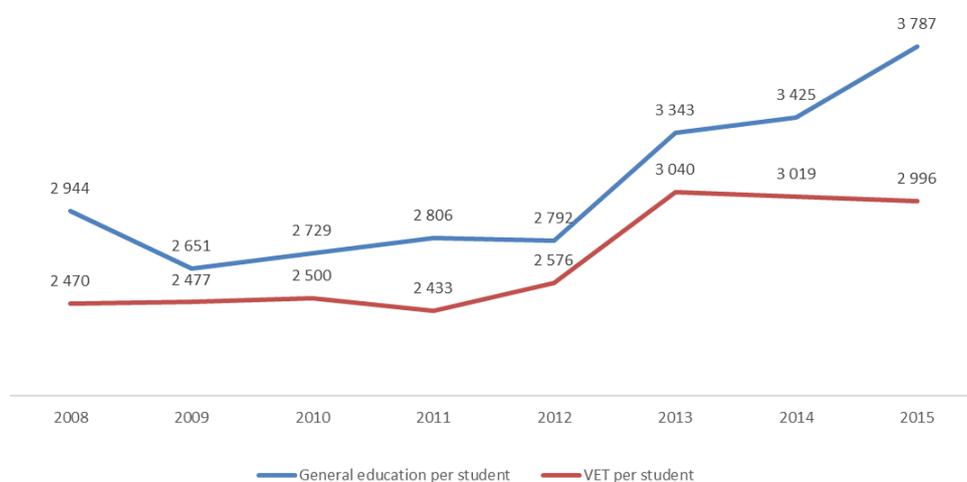


Source: Ministry of Education and Research: *Haridussilm* [educational statistics database] [extracted on 25.4.18].

2.3. VET funding

Formal VET is mostly state-financed. In 2017/18, 99% of the 24 143 initial and continuing VET learners were in state-financed programmes.

Figure 17. Expenditure per student in 2008-15 (EUR)



NB: Most recent data. Investments in infrastructure and equipment are excluded.

Source: Source: State Accounting Balances System (UOE methodology) [extracted on 18.5.18].

Until this year, vocational education was generally financed through state commissioned study places. Each year, the education minister defined the number of learners to be financed from the state budget for the following three years by curriculum group and VET provider (for example 'media technologies' that comprises of curricula from related fields such as 'multimedia', 'printing technology' and 'photography'). The figures were updated annually for the next two years. Starting from this year, a new model for financing vocational education is introduced, which will no longer proceed solely from the number of state-commissioned student

places, instead, the school, its activities and performance will be financed as a whole. The new model will also lead to an increase in the financing of vocational schools.

The new financing model consists of basic financing and performance financing. This secures the budgetary stability of the management and HR expenses of schools. Basic financing considers the number of learners, the areas taught, the salary rates of teachers, the specific features of specialties, students with special needs, the need for support specialists, and the buildings used by the school.

Basic financing is fixed for three years and guarantees the funds required for the main activities of the schools.

Performance financing, which values the outstanding achievements of schools, is based on performance indicators, which comply with the strategic goals important to the state. These include the share of students who graduate after the nominal period of study, the share of graduates who go further in their learning or participate in employment, the share of students who graduate by taking a professional examination, and the share of students participating in apprenticeship training. One of the ideas behind performance financing is to guarantee that vocational schools have the funds they need for cooperation with companies and general education schools. Performance financing will comprise up to approximately 20% of the money the school receives from the state budget.

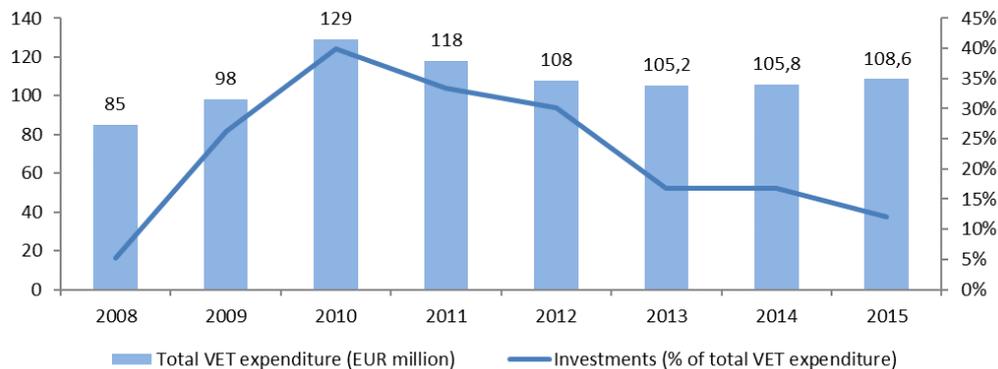
In 2018, it is the plan to implement basic financing in the first stage and to gradually implement performance financing as additional funds are allocated from the state budget.

A few privately financed VET programmes are available in state and municipal VET schools. Such programmes are usually in high demand (as with cosmetician) but are not part of the state-financed programmes. Apprenticeships (travel costs and study allowance) are also jointly financed by ESF.

State and municipal vocational schools may provide continuing training for adults for a fee without age restrictions. They can also attract additional financing from other sources, such as international projects.

Total expenditure on VET has decreased from EUR 129 million in 2010 to EUR 108.6 million in 2015 due to reduced investment in infrastructure and equipment as several big VET investment projects have been completed.

Figure 18. VET total expenditure and investments in 2008-15



NB: Most recent data.

Source: Source: State Accounting Balances System (UOE methodology) [extracted on 18.05.18].

Public VET expenditure as a share of total government expenditure has also decreased, from 1.6% in 2012 to 1.3% in 2015, because total government expenditure increased nominally more than its expenditure on VET. Approximately 49% of total expenditure is expenditure on staff compensations.

2.4. Other forms of training

This section briefly describes continuing non-formal training courses for adults that are regulated by the Adult Education Act (Parliament, 2015) and can be provided by VET institutions, given they have acquired that right in a public procurement.

Continuing training offers purposeful and organised studies outside formal education and on the basis of a course curriculum. Its forms, duration and content vary. The costs are usually covered by learners or their employers, and in recent years to a large extent by ESF.

Education, social affairs and economics ministries coordinate adult education in Estonia. The Ministry of Education and Research designs and implements the national adult education policy, and its principles and objectives. It also supports adult educators, providers and learners. The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for (re)training the unemployed and other groups at risk through the public employment service ⁽²³⁾. The service offers labour market training to jobseekers and the unemployed free of charge (financed from the state budget) (Parliament, 2005). Training is chosen in cooperation with a consultant and is focused on the knowledge and skills that make it easier to find a job. The training is usually conducted in groups of 6 to 12 members. It lasts from one day to one year and may be offered as distance learning (e-learning). The content takes professional standards and employer needs into account. The Ministry of

⁽²³⁾ Unemployment Insurance Fund.

Economic Affairs and Communications creates the conditions for the regular provision of education and training for employees to meet the needs of the companies.

The Adult Education Act (Parliament, 2015) harmonises the requirements for continuing education providers: all curricula are public; providers must have a website and certificates must comply with defined criteria; continuing education providers should be registered in the public database. The quality of training is supported by the outcome-based curricula and descriptions of qualification, competences and professional experience of the training providers on their websites.

Non-formal training is mainly provided by nearly 1 000 private training providers that form a large part of the adult education sector, but also by VET schools, professional higher education institutions and universities ⁽²⁴⁾.

2.5. VET governance

According to legislation ⁽²⁵⁾, parliament (*Riigikogu*), the government (*Eesti Vabariigi Valitsus*), and the education ministry jointly oversee the VET system at the national level. The VET legislation was substantially renewed in the late 1990s and in 2013. Social partners, including trade unions and employer organisations participated in the working group on developing legislation.

Parliament adopts legal acts. The government approves national education policy, with the *Estonian lifelong learning strategy 2020* (MoER et al., 2014) guiding the most important developments in education. It also approves higher education and VET standards and framework requirements for teacher training (Section 2.6).

The VET standard (Government, 2013) defines:

- (a) a learning outcomes approach;
- (b) requirements for VET curricula:
 - (i) the volume and structure of programmes, including joint programmes, for example between VET and professional higher education;
 - (ii) entry and completion requirements;
 - (iii) key competences;
- (c) principles for curriculum updates;
- (d) principles for recognition of prior learning and work experience;
- (e) the list of programme groups, study fields and curriculum groups combining several programmes. Examples of the curriculum groups are 'travel and tourism', 'social work' and 'banking, finance and insurance'.

⁽²⁴⁾ MoER: *EHIS. Eesti Hariduse Infosüsteem [Estonian education information system]*. <http://www.ehis.ee/> (data as of June 2018).

⁽²⁵⁾ Vocational Educational Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013); Vocational education standard (Government, 2013), work-based learning regulation (MoER, 2007); Private Schools Act (Parliament, 1998b); Professional Higher Education Institutions Act (Parliament, 1998a); Adult Education Act (Parliament, 2015); Professions Act (Parliament, 2008a); Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications Act (Parliament, 2008b); Study Allowances and Study Loans Act (Parliament, 2003a); Youth Work Act (Parliament, 2010b).

The education ministry is responsible for delivering the strategy and its nine programmes⁽²⁶⁾, including the vocational education programme (MoER, 2015a). The education minister also approves national VET curricula.

Since 2012, Foundation Innove⁽²⁷⁾ has been designated by the Ministry of Education and Research to implement national education policy. Foundation Innove coordinates and promotes general and vocational education, offers career and educational counselling services through the nationwide *Rajaleidja* network and mediates European Union grants in fields of education and working life. In VET, the foundation organises the development of national curricula, supports implementation and organises VET teacher training.

The participation of social partners in VET is regulated by national legislation and partnership agreements.

At the national level, the Chamber of Commerce (*Eesti Kaubandus-Tööstuskoda*), the Employers' Confederation (*Eesti Töoandjate Keskliit*) and the Confederation of Trade Unions (*Eesti Ametiühingute Keskliit*) represent social partners. Employers play an active and influential role in the professional councils (*kutsenõukogud*) and in drawing up standards for each occupation.

At the local level, social partners participate in VET school counsellor boards (*kutseõppeasutuse nõunike kogu*), established under the Vocational Educational Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013). The boards comprise of at least seven members in total. Advisory bodies link VET schools and society, advising the school and its management on planning and organising educational and economic activities.

VET schools can be owned by central or local government or be privately owned. They all have a similar management structure in line with the Vocational Educational Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013). The highest collegial decision-making body of the school is the council (*nõukogu*), which organises the activities, and plans school development. The head of the school (*direktor*) is also the head of the council, managing the school according to the plan, including financial resources.

In 2017/18, 26 of 33 VET institutions were state-owned and run by the Ministry of Education and Research. Municipalities ran three VET schools and four were private. In addition, five professional higher education institutions provided VET programmes at the post-secondary level (ISCED 4) along with higher education (ISCED 6).

2.6. Teachers and trainers

The lifelong learning strategy up to 2020 supports creating conditions for competent and motivated teachers as one of its five strategic goals. It aims at offering competitive wages and working conditions, leading to a positive image of teachers in society. Currently, the teaching

⁽²⁶⁾ (1) Competent and motivated teachers and school leadership programme; (2) digital focus programme; (3) labour market and education cooperation programme; (4) school network programme; (5) study and career counselling programme; (6) general education programme; (7) vocational education programme; (8) higher education programme; (9) adult education programme.

⁽²⁷⁾ Until the end of 2011 this function was performed by the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre (NEQC) (*Riiklik Eksami- ja Kvalifikatsioonikeskus*). In 2012, NEQC joined Foundation Innove.

profession is not an attractive option for young people. The highest share of VET teachers (51.7%) are aged 50 and above ⁽²⁸⁾ and their share has been increasing in the past decade. Most VET teachers are females; however, the share of males (39%) is more than double the share in general education.

2.6.1. Qualification requirements

In the Vocational Educational Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013), the term 'teacher' is used for both teachers and trainers. The act has also specified that qualification requirements of VET teachers should be based on professional standards. These standards distinguish between subject teachers and vocational teachers in VET.

Subject teachers can work in VET, but also in general education schools. A master's degree is required for subject teachers (also called 'second cycle higher education diploma') equal to 300 ECTS credits and they might teach, for instance, mathematics, physics and languages.

Vocational teachers offer knowledge and skills in the field of their professional expertise (what are also called 'specialty subjects'). Qualification requirements are different compared to teachers of general subjects, allowing more flexibility to professionals who want to teach. This also improves the link to the labour market. The professional standard ⁽²⁹⁾ defines three qualification levels (EQF levels 5, 6 and 7) for vocational teachers (*kutseõpetaja*). Some vocational teachers work part-time and have no pedagogical qualification. Vocational teacher education is offered at EQF level 6 (BA) at the University of Tallinn and the University of Tartu. According to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act, a VET provider cannot employ more than 20% of staff with the lowest level qualification (EQF level 5).

Teachers work on the basis of an employment contract. The head of a school concludes, amends and terminates employment contracts with teachers in accordance with the Employment Contracts Act. Employment contracts are of an indefinite duration; reduced working time (35 hours per week) applies.

2.6.2. Continuing professional development

The Vocational Educational Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013) stipulates that VET teachers shall participate in continuing education according to the individual training need. Teachers are obliged to develop their professional skills and be aware of new developments in the world of education. Continuing professional development also provides teachers with the opportunity to evaluate ones' own competences and to develop lifelong learning skills.

In 2015, the minimum continuing professional development requirements (160 academic hours per five years for general education subject teachers and two months per three years for vocational teachers) were changed. Instead, a new approach takes account of teachers' individual needs depending on their current competences and tasks, and the needs of VET providers. This approach applies to all VET teachers.

⁽²⁸⁾ Source: EHIS. *Eesti Hariduse Infosüsteem [Estonian education information system]*.

⁽²⁹⁾ Kutsekoda: http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutsesysteem/tutvustus/kutsestandardid_eng

VET providers offer tailored training to teachers in accordance with their annual self-evaluation and feedback from the school leader. Self-evaluation replaces the former system of teacher attestation.

Teacher practice at an enterprise or institution ⁽³⁰⁾ may also be counted towards continuing professional development. It is professional work performed in a work environment with a specific purpose and has a direct link with the teachers' area of expertise. Teachers are not obliged to teach during their own practice period.

The leading continuing professional development providers are universities, followed by VET providers, private companies, and foundation courses.

More information is available in the Cedefop ReferNet thematic perspective on teachers and trainers (Taimsoo, 2016).

⁽³⁰⁾ E.g. healthcare or social services.

CHAPTER 3.

Shaping VET qualifications

3.1. Anticipating skill needs

The *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* (MoER et al., 2014) supports the creation of learning opportunities and career services that are of good quality, flexible and diverse, and take account of labour market needs. It also aims at increasing the number of people with vocational or professional qualifications in all age groups and regions. The anticipation of skill needs in the Estonian labour market is based on forecasts by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications (MoEC).

Since 2003, the MoEC has produced labour market needs forecasts and updated them annually. Its quantitative data analysis shows demand in the national economy for employees by sector and qualification level. Over the years, the methodology has been updated. Forecasts are based on the data of the 2011 population census and labour force surveys conducted by Statistics Estonia. They cover 39 economic (sub)sectors and five major professional groups:

- a) managers;
- b) specialists;
- c) service staff;
- d) skilled workers;
- e) unskilled workers.

The forecasts reflect changes in employment and the need to replace employees leaving the labour market. The latest forecast considers the period 2017-2025 (MoEC, 2017).

In 2015, the Ministry of Education and Research launched a new labour market needs monitoring and forecasting system, known by its Estonian acronym **OSKA**. Managed by the Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*), it assesses skill needs by economic sector (such as information and communications technology, accounting) and develops new evidence and intelligence for stakeholders in education and the business world.

OSKA applied research surveys on sectoral needs for labour and skills combine qualitative and quantitative research methods and analyse professional qualifications across all levels of education. For this purpose, both statistical data and information collected from personal interviews with sectoral experts and group discussions are used. Five economic sectors are examined each year. Each sector is analysed every six years on average. In the intervening years, the relevant sectoral expert panels keep an eye on the implementation of the recommendations made on the basis of the conclusions of the survey. Quantitative analysis builds on the data from the relevant registers and surveys (EHIS, the Labour Force Survey, the Population and Housing Census 2011, sectoral surveys, EKOMAR, etc.) as well as on the forecasts of labour market needs prepared by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. Further information on employment, skills and qualifications is collected from personal interviews with sectoral experts and from group discussions. The interviews examine future economic trends and the resulting changes in the needs for workers, skills, education and

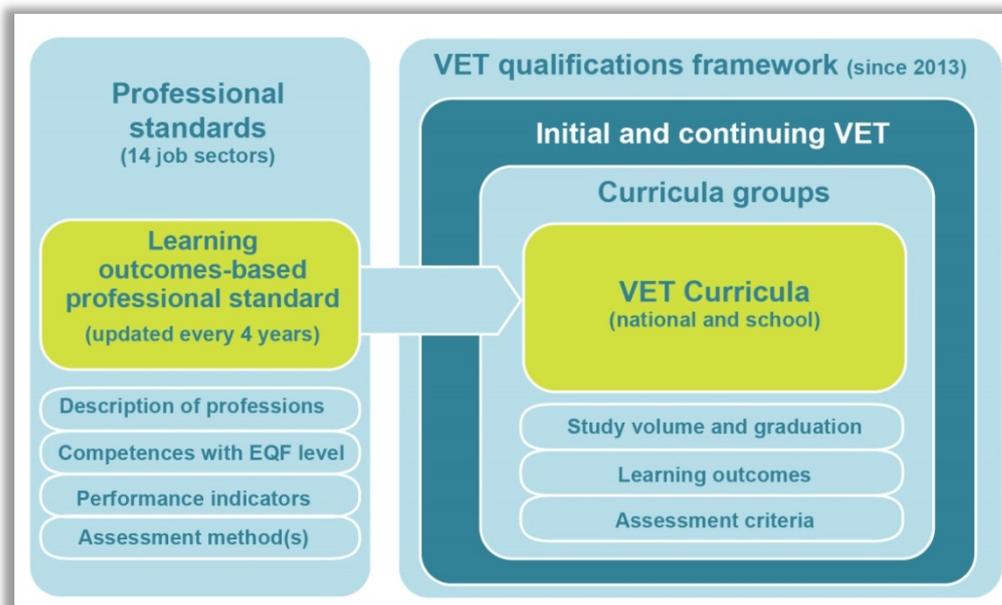
training in each sector, and provide input with suggestions for improving qualifications. The system comprises of 23 expert panels of employer representatives, education professionals, researchers, public opinion leaders, trade unions, and policy-makers. By 2020, each panel, representing one sector, will publish a report with practical recommendations to decision-makers and stakeholders. Sectoral expert panels also assess labour requirements in quantitative terms and by training capacities broken down by key professions.

The first five OSKA reports, on accounting; the forestry and timber industry; information and communications technologies (ICT); manufacturing of metal products, machinery and equipment; and social work, were published in 2016. Another six sectors were covered in 2017: construction; energy and mining; healthcare; production of chemicals, rubber, plastic and construction materials; the agriculture and food industry; and transportation, logistics and repair of motor vehicles. A further five sectors will be covered in 2018. Based on the sectoral reports, a 10-year forecasting report on changes in labour market demand, developments and trends is updated and presented to the government annually. The forecasting results are used for career counselling, curriculum development and strategic planning at all education levels, including vocational education and training (VET).

3.2. Designing qualifications

Initial and continuing VET qualifications are based on professional standards that are part of the professional qualifications system (Figure 19).

Figure 19. VET qualifications and professional standards



Source: Cedefop based on ReferNet Estonia.

3.2.1. Professional standards

A professional qualification standard is a document that describes professional activities and provides the competency requirements for professional qualifications and their levels. A professional standard consists of three parts. **Part A** of the standard (description of the

profession) provides an overview of the nature of the work, major parts of the work and tasks, the necessary tools, the work environment, incl. the specificities of the work, and describes the personal characteristics and skills enhancing professional activities. This is a source of information for a person upon the selection of a profession, shaping his or her career path. This also contains useful information for career advisers, labour market consultants, human resources managers, and trainers.

The competence requirements presented in **part B** of the standard serve as a basis for the assessment of the applicant for the professional qualification. These requirements are presented as descriptions of mandatory and optional competences. Competence is an ability to perform a specific part of work or a task together with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for that. Proceeding from the nature of the profession, its specificity and traditions, attesting competences related to a specialisation or optional competences may be the prerequisite for being awarded the occupational qualification.

Part C contains general information about the professional standard (compilers of professional standard, approving body, validity period, reference to ISCO 2008, reference to EQF, related curricula, etc.) and references to annexes.

Professional standards are used for designing VET curricula, curricula for higher education and other training programmes, for assessing learner competences, and awarding a professional qualification. They:

- a) are based on a job analysis and describe the nature of the work; analyses are carried out by working groups designing professional standards;
- b) describe expected competences as observable and assessable;
- c) define the method(s) for assessing learner competences and a 'satisfactory' threshold;
- d) define qualification (EQF) levels.

All professional standards are available in the state register ⁽³¹⁾. In June 2018, the state register of professional qualifications included 553 professional standards in 95 professional areas.

3.2.2. VET qualifications

Uniform requirements for VET curricula and qualifications are stipulated by the VET standard (Government, 2013). The standard describes the requirements for national and school curricula and the curriculum groups in line with EQF and ISCED levels, their objectives and expected learning outcomes. It determines the terms and conditions for recognising prior learning, volume of study and graduation requirements by initial and continuing VET curricula; it defines requirements for teachers and trainers. It also assigns the national qualifications framework levels to VET qualification types.

VET schools design curricula for every qualification offered.

Upper secondary VET programme curricula that give access to higher education are based on the national curricula. National curricula are based on professional standards, the VET

⁽³¹⁾ Kutsedoda: *State register of occupational qualifications*: <http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutseregister>

standard and the national (general education) curriculum for upper secondary schools. Foundation Innove coordinates the process of curriculum design, including cooperation with social partners.

Other VET curricula are based on the VET standard and the respective professional standard(s). Where such standards do not exist, the school must apply for recognition of the curriculum by social partners.

National upper secondary VET curricula that give access to higher education are approved by the Minister of Education and Research.

The VET standard (Government, 2013) determines the types of descriptors of learning outcomes of curricula:

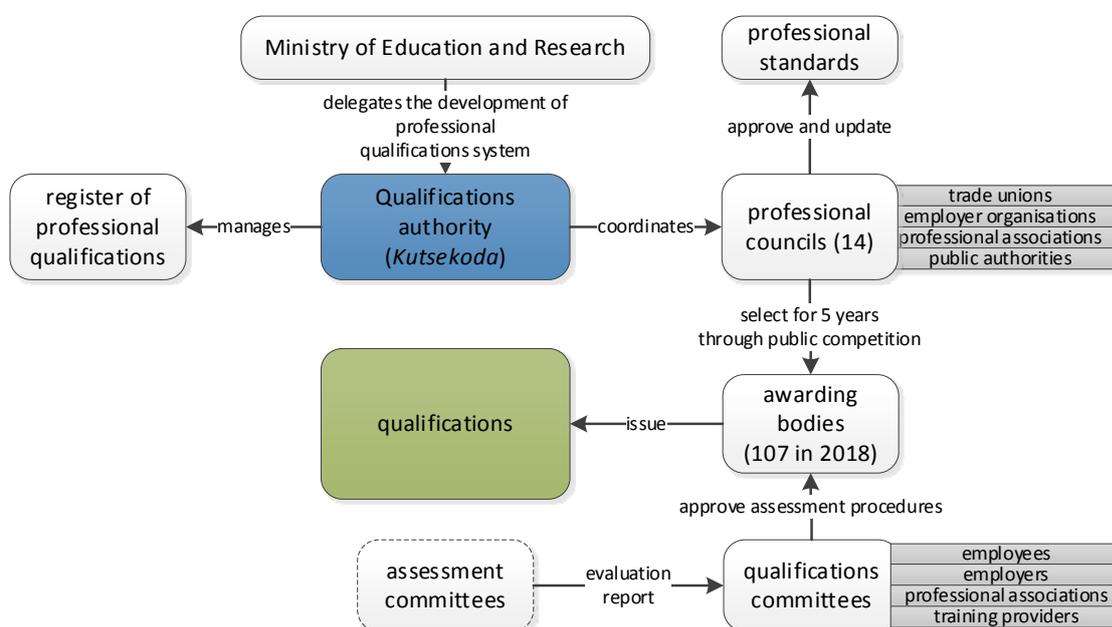
- a) profession-specific knowledge are the facts and/or theories acquired through the learning process;
- b) profession-specific skills are the ability to apply knowledge for performing tasks and solving problems; skills are described in terms of their complexity and diversity;
- c) autonomy and responsibility describe to what extent the graduate is able to work independently and take responsibility for the work results;
- d) learning skills are the ability to manage the learning process using efficient strategies and appropriate learning styles;
- e) communication skills are the ability to communicate in different situations and on different topics orally and in writing;
- f) self-management competence is the ability to understand and evaluate oneself, give sense to one's own activities and behaviour in society, to develop oneself as a person;
- g) operational competence is the ability to identify problems and solve them, to plan one's own activities, set goals and expected results, select adequate tools, act, and evaluate the results of one's own action, to cooperate with others;
- h) ICT competence is the ability to use ICT tools and digital media skilfully and critically;
- i) entrepreneurship competence is the ability to take initiative, act creatively, plan one's own career in the modern economic, business and work environment, and apply knowledge and skills in different spheres of life.

3.2.3. Managing qualifications

Several bodies are involved in designing, updating and awarding qualifications (Parliament, 2008a):

- a) the Ministry of Education and Research;
- b) professional councils;
- c) awarding bodies;
- d) qualifications committees;
- e) assessment committees.

Figure 20. Qualification bodies



Source: Cedefop based on ReferNet Estonia.

The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for developing a professional qualifications system. This task is delegated to the qualifications authority (*Kutsekoda*), a private foundation led by a council comprising of representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry; the Employers' Confederation; Employees' Unions Confederation; the Confederation of Trade Unions; and the education, finance, economic and social affairs ministries. The qualifications authority organises and coordinates the activities of professional councils and keeps the register of professional qualifications.

Professional councils represent 14 job sectors. The councils approve and update professional standards and are represented equally by trade unions, employer organisations, professional associations, and public authorities. Chairs of professional councils form a board of chairpersons for these councils to coordinate cooperation between them.

Professional councils select awarding bodies (public and private) to organise the assessment of competences and issue qualifications. The awarding bodies are selected for five years through a public competition organised by the qualifications authority. VET providers may also be given the right to award qualifications, if the curriculum of the institution complies with the professional standard and is nationally recognised. Qualifications are entered into the state register of professional qualifications ⁽³²⁾. As of 2018, there are many institutions (107) awarding professional qualifications.

⁽³²⁾ Kutsekoda: *State register of occupational qualifications*: <http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutseregister>

The awarding body sets up a committee involving sectoral stakeholders: employers, employees, training providers, and representatives of professional associations. Often it also includes customer representatives and other interested parties. This ensures impartiality in awarding qualifications. The committee approves assessment procedures, including examination materials, decides on awarding qualifications, and resolves complaints. It may set up an assessment committee that evaluates the organisation and results of the assessment and reports to the qualifications committee.

The assessment committee verifies to what extent the applicant's competences meet the requirements of the professional qualification standards. The assessment criteria are described in the rules and procedures for awarding the qualification or in the respective assessment standard.

A person's competences can be assessed and recognised regardless of whether they have been acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal learning.

3.3. Recognition of prior learning

The recognition of prior learning helps assess applicant competences against stated criteria, indicating whether these competences match with education programme enrolment requirements and learning outcomes or with those in occupational standards. The process helps value competences regardless of the time, place and the way they have been acquired; supporting lifelong learning (Figure 9) and mobility, improving access to education for at-risk groups, and supporting the more efficient use of resources (Cedefop, 2016).

The VET sector in Estonia has introduced the recognition of prior learning following developments in the higher education sector. The recognition process is legally established by the Vocational Educational Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013). General principles for all VET providers are set in the VET standard (Government, 2013).

The lifelong learning strategy up to 2020 and its adult education programme (MoER, 2015c) support development of quality and the broader use of validation practices.

Awarding bodies, including VET providers, are responsible for developing detailed recognition procedures. Prior learning may be taken into account by educational institutions when admitting learners to their programmes. Learners may also be exempt from a part of a curriculum, if they have achieved and demonstrated relevant learning outcomes. In such cases, the level of learning outcomes demonstrated can be considered as the final grade for the subject or module.

VET providers offering recognition of prior learning make public the terms, conditions, and procedures that apply, including deadlines and fees. They must also provide counselling to candidates.

Successful recognition results in a certificate or diploma. Experiential learning, hobby activities or any other everyday activity are certified by reference to the work accomplished and presentation of it, such as through a qualification certificate, contract of employment, copy of assignment to the post or any other documentary proof. A description of vocational experience and self-analysis is added to the application. If necessary, VET providers may give applicants practical tasks, conduct interviews or use other assessment methods (Cedefop, 2016).

Since 2017 the data about validation of non-formal and informal learning is collected in the education information database. A total of 3.5% of students in VET institutions have been applying for recognition and validation of their prior studies and work experience.

3.4. Quality assurance

VET quality is assured through external and internal processes that make no difference in their approach between school-based learning, work-based learning, self-learning (including 'non-stationary'), and apprenticeships ⁽³³⁾.

3.4.1. External quality assurance

External quality assurance of a school's curriculum groups ⁽³⁴⁾ is confirmed by awarding the 'right to offer VET programmes'.

The right to provide initial and continuing VET in the curriculum group is granted to a school for three years. The education minister decides the granting of this right on the basis of documents submitted by the school, the results of an external assessment by an expert committee, and additional evidence, if necessary (Parliament, 2013).

To extend this right, the curriculum group must be accredited. Accreditation comprises of the external evaluation of curriculum groups at schools, based on their internal evaluation reports and an assessment conducted by an external committee. Performance, sustainability, leadership, cooperation with stakeholders, and management of resources, including human resources, are evaluated. Accreditation is organised by the Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA). The evaluation report, including the internal evaluation, is publicly available and the outcomes are used to improve curricula and learning methods, strategic planning and management of VET providers. The education ministry, as the owner of VET schools, evaluates the reports in the light of strategic development planning at the provider and system level.

The quality evaluation council, appointed by the education minister, works under the auspices of EKKA and comprises of 13 members, representing stakeholders. It approves accreditation decisions and makes proposals on the extension of the right to provide instruction.

Based on the council proposal, the education minister can extend accreditation for three or six years, or refuse to extend it.

EKKA provides free counselling to VET schools that support self-assessment and conducting internal evaluation reporting. The competent and motivated teachers and school leadership programme, one of the nine programmes of the *Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* (MoER, 2015b) enables trainings for school leaders and teachers.

⁽³³⁾ Comprising more than 50% self-learning.

⁽³⁴⁾ A curriculum group (e.g. media technologies) comprises curricula from related fields (e.g. multimedia; printing technology; and photography).

3.4.2. Internal evaluation

In 2006, internal evaluation of educational institutions became mandatory, the objective being to support the development of VET providers. VET providers constantly (formally at least every three years) conduct an internal evaluation of each curriculum group and draft a report. Since 2013, EKKA has consulted them on this process.

Internal evaluation is linked to provider development plans, which are drafted following the performance analysis. The internal evaluation criteria are similar to those for external evaluation: leadership and administration, resource management (including human resources), cooperation with interest groups, and the education process. Methods of internal evaluation are chosen by VET providers (MoER and SICI, 2016). They often use the activity and performance indicators provided in the education statistics database *HaridusSilm*.

Internal evaluation reports are essential for extending the right to offer VET programmes in the respective curriculum group (Section 3.4.1).

The education information system collects data about the internal evaluation and feedback reports, so the ministry is able to check whether internal evaluations have been conducted and supported by advisory services. The results of internal evaluations are public, but educational institutions are not obliged to make them available on their websites.

CHAPTER 4.

Promoting VET participation

4.1. Incentives for VET providers

Promoting participation in vocational education and training (VET) is a political priority in Estonia. The labour market and education cooperation programme ⁽³⁵⁾ aims at making VET more attractive for young people by improving its image and raising awareness.

The programme offers VET providers counselling and support from professional public relations companies on how to develop communication strategies. Regular seminars and in-service training are organised for VET school communication and marketing specialists.

Information about learning opportunities in VET and success stories are also disseminated to young people and adults through social media.

National skills competitions are organised in cooperation with enterprises, training providers and professional associations to raise VET awareness. The winners of national competitions participate in international competitions. In 2018, national skill competitions were held in 33 professions.

4.2. Incentives for learners

4.2.1. Allowances, meals and travel subsidy

VET learners can apply for basic and special study allowances:

- a) the monthly basic allowance is EUR 60 and is available from semester two in formal full-time programmes. The basis for paying the basic allowance is the ranking of students based on learning results. Around 40% of VET learners receive the basic allowance;
- b) a special allowance can be granted to learners in a difficult economic situation; the board of the education institution approves the procedure to use the provider's special allowance fund.

VET providers create allowance funds (basic and special) which are financed from the state budget. The special allowance fund can be up to 50% of the resources of the basic allowance fund.

Lunchtime meals are also paid by the state. This applies to VET learners up to age 20 who have not completed secondary education ⁽³⁶⁾ according to the initial training curricula (Parliament, 2013).

VET learners ⁽³⁷⁾ are also reimbursed for public transport tickets between the learning venue and home. Dormitory residents and those who rent apartments close to the learning

⁽³⁵⁾ Part of the lifelong learning strategy up to 2020.

⁽³⁶⁾ Excluding 'non-stationary' programmes, i.e. comprising more than 50% self-learning.

⁽³⁷⁾ Excluding 'non-stationary' programmes, i.e. comprising more than 50% self-learning.

venue are reimbursed one return ticket to their hometown per week and an additional ticket during national and school holidays.

4.2.2. Study loans

In 2003, study loans were introduced to improve access to full-time post-secondary VET and on-time graduation. Secondary education graduates, who wish to enrol in formal VET programmes at least six months in length, can apply. Since 2015/16, part-time students may also apply. In 2016/17, 1.6% of VET learners benefited from the loan ⁽³⁸⁾. Since 2018/19 the amount of the study loan is up to EUR 2 000 per year.

4.2.3. Tax exemption on training costs

Estonian residents can be exempt from income tax on training costs: those incurred for studying in programmes and courses for a fee at a state or local government education institution, or licensed private/foreign provider (Parliament, 1999).

4.2.4. Study leave for employees

The Adult Education Act (Parliament, 2015) provides the right for employees to take leave of up to 30 calendar days per year while in formal education or professional training. On application, the employee must present written proof of studies from the provider. During leave, employers pay the average study leave based on a calendar day for 20 calendar days. Additional study leave (15 days) is granted for preparing for final exams; study leave pay calculated on the basis of the minimum wage is paid to employees (EUR 500 per month or EUR 2.97 per hour in 2018). An employee also has the right to leave without pay to sit entry examinations. These rights and benefits are applied in the public and private sector, in small, medium-sized and large companies.

4.2.5. Incentives for the unemployed

The Ministry of Social Affairs (*Sotsiaalministeerium*) is responsible for training the unemployed. Vocational training for the unemployed is funded by the public employment service ⁽³⁹⁾. This allocates resources to employment services to purchase and organise labour market training. It commissions training from educational institutions, including VET providers, as well as private.

The public employment service also supports work-practice placement for the unemployed through agreements. The participant continues to receive an unemployment benefit, and is granted a scholarship and travel compensation, and paid by the employment service.

Since 2009, labour market training for the unemployed has also been offered on the basis of a voucher system. Vouchers offer a quick and flexible way for the unemployed to use the resources for further training or retrain to find a new job. The service covers up to EUR 2 500 per training during two years.

In May 2017, the public employment service launched a new package of services for unemployment prevention through continuing training and retraining. Individuals are encouraged to move to jobs that create higher added value. Examples are workers who are likely to lose

⁽³⁸⁾ MoER: *EHIS. Eesti Hariduse Infosüsteem [Estonian education information system]*. <http://www.ehis.ee/>

⁽³⁹⁾ [Unemployment Insurance Fund](#).

jobs, but could retain their employment; those without a qualification or whose skills are outdated and do not correspond to the needs of the labour market; workers with poor knowledge of Estonia; and those aged over 50. The package also supports employees who cannot continue their present employment due to health issues.

This service package also offers a study allowance scheme that supports participation in VET and in higher education. People at risk of unemployment now have access to labour market training through vouchers. In addition to direct support to employees, skills development is supported by compensating 50% to 100% of the training costs to employers. Employers can apply for a training grant to support their workers in adapting to the changes in business processes, in technology, or changes in formal qualification requirements. Employers can also use the grant to fill vacancies in high demand roles by equipping potential employees with the necessary skills.

More than 3 700 people are estimated (by ESF) as receiving this support in 2017, and around 15 000 to 19 000 annually in 2018-20.

4.3. Incentives for enterprises

4.3.1. Wage subsidy and training remuneration

Employers are reimbursed by the state for supervising work practices for the unemployed (Parliament, 2005), with a daily supervision rate of EUR 22.24 – eight times the minimum hourly wage (EUR 2.97 in 2018) (Parliament, 2009) – for each day attended of the first month of training. Reimbursement decreases to 75% of the daily rate during the second month, and to 50% during the third and fourth month.

4.3.2. Tax exemptions

There is no value added tax for formal training; this includes learning materials, private tuition relating to general education, and other training services, unless provided for business purposes (Parliament, 2003b).

Since 2012, enterprises have been exempt from income tax if they finance the formal education of their employees (Parliament, 1999a).

4.4. Guidance and counselling

4.4.1. Strategy and provision

The lifelong learning strategy up to 2020 promotes diverse learning opportunities and career services that are of good quality, flexible, and take account of the needs of the labour market. This will also help increase the number of people with VET qualifications in different age groups and regions.

In 2014, the education ministry developed and endorsed a study and career counselling programme. This is part of the *Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020* (MoER et al., 2014) and is partly financed by the ESF. The programme regulates the provision of study counselling and career services for young people. Study counselling – special education guidance, speech

therapy, social pedagogical and psychological counselling – is provided to pre-school children and to students in primary, general education and/or VET. Career services (information and counselling) are provided to people up to age 26. Special attention is paid to the transition from one education level to another, and to early leavers from education and training. Through a county-based network of career and study centres called *Rajaleidja* ('Pathfinder'; 15 in total), the programme envisages an integrated approach to counselling services and improvements in their quality and availability.

The network of *Rajaleidja* centres was established in 2014. Implementation of a quality management system, training of career and study counselling specialists, evaluation and monitoring of service quality, compiling and distribution of methodology and guidance publications have been developed.

Offering systematic, thoroughly considered and coordinated career services can allow young people to make informed choices in lifelong learning and in working life. This can help increase the number of young people continuing their education pathways and reduce the number of early leavers. In the longer term, the employability of young people would increase. By 2020, around 174 000 young people will be provided individual study and/or career guidance.

Career guidance is provided within formal education as part of the curricula. Within general education, career education is offered as a compulsory cross-curricular theme and additionally as elective courses. Career-related issues are also discussed in student evaluations, during aptitude and professional suitability evaluations. The schools organise information sessions and visits to fairs, seminars and lectures. *Rajaleidja* centres visit schools to provide individual and group counselling and career information services. They also support schools in implementing the cross-curricular theme 'lifelong learning and career planning'.

The modernisation of the national VET curricula has been in process during recent years. New curricula include the learning outcome: 'the student understands his/her responsibility to make informed decisions in lifelong career planning processes'. This means that career management has become an integral part of VET. In developing career planning skills in VET there is a focus on self-evaluation, how best to use the learner's professional skills in the labour market, how to keep and raise professional qualifications through continuous self-improvement, how to combine family life and work, and how to value health.

Since 2009, the career counsellor network in the labour market sector has been coordinated by the public employment service ⁽⁴⁰⁾. It offers career guidance services to the adult population. Since 2015, in parallel to career guidance services provided by *Rajaleidja* centres, the service provides workshops for young people in schools – students of grades 8 to 12 – to introduce them to the labour market and working life. These workshops are mostly financed from the EU budget. The European job mobility portal (EURES) network counsellors are engaged in 16 career information points that help search for jobs in the EU and the European Free Trade Association countries. There are career information specialists and counsellors working in every public employment service department.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ [Unemployment Insurance Fund](#).

All guidance services for young people provided by *Rajaleidja* centres and the public employment service are free of charge. They are offered in individual and group settings, often accompanied by computer-based activities.

4.4.2. Career services quality assurance

Career and study counselling services in *Rajaleidja* centres are supported by three quality manuals. Career education in schools is supported by quality guidelines and evaluated internally.

There are professional standards for 'career counsellors', 'career information specialists' and 'career coordinators at schools'. These standards regulate the required level of education and specialisation.

Most practitioners have a background in psychology, youth work, teacher training, information sciences or social work. To be eligible to apply for a professional qualification, career counsellors must have between two and five years of work-experience; career information specialists must have between one and three years.

There are no regular accredited basic training programmes offered to the career specialists in public universities. Foundation Innove organises varied short- and long-term in-service training for career practitioners under the study and career counselling programme (MoER, 2014). Specialised study programmes for all three groups of career specialists are provided in cooperation with three main public universities.

Study programmes are based on the professional skills requirements set out in the professional standards. The lifelong guidance agency organises international study visits in cooperation with colleagues from the Euroguidance network to exchange knowledge related to the provision and development of career services. Foundation Innove provides methodological support to career specialists.

4.5. Key challenges and development opportunities

The lifelong learning strategy up to 2020 defines priorities for new developments and initiatives in education and training. One of its key objectives for VET is to reduce the share of adults (aged 25 to 64) without a VET qualification and to increase the share of VET learners compared with general education. Several actions support the achieving of these and other objectives:

- a) prevention of early leaving from VET:
 - I. Schools are expected to take more responsibility in this area. A challenge is to keep the most vulnerable learners in VET programmes, since they are insufficiently motivated. The state provides schools with relevant data about dropout rates and trends, organises seminars to change experiences, and offers financial support for schools that pilot new programmes focusing on young learners not in employment, education or training. Better career guidance and counselling to help prospective learners make the right education choices;
- b) efficient use of OSKA findings in VET:

- I. Discussions are under way on how to incorporate monitoring and forecasting findings in VET provision. Education changes are not immediate, while entrepreneurs hope for rapid changes in graduate skills;
- c) enlargement of apprenticeships, by providing additional ESF financed study places;
- d) renewing the financing model of VET by introducing basic and performance based funding to secure the budgetary stability of the management and HR expenses of schools;
- e) development of an quality assurance approach according to the changed approach to learning by renewing assessment criteria and focusing on the learning outcome based curricula development and implementation, concentrating on the learning-centred learning and teaching process as a whole;
- f) new collaborative partnerships between general education and VET providers to promote learner-centred approaches and to offer learners more opportunities to engage in flexible learning pathways;
- g) a national programme supports the development of digital competences, including in VET. Its objective is to promote a holistic approach to developing digital competences and the result-oriented use of learning technologies. Measures to raise the popularity of the teaching profession aim to make it a viable choice for young people;
- h) support measures to promote Estonian as a second language and foreign language learning in VET schools. Language skills would improve career opportunities and labour market mobility of graduates.

Acronyms and abbreviations

EHIS	<i>Eesti Hariduse Infosüsteem,</i> Estonian education information system
EKKA	<i>Eesti Kõrg- ja Kutsehariduse Kvaliteediagentuur,</i> Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education
ECTS	European credit transfer and accumulation system
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund
EE	Estonia
EU	European Union
ICT	information and communications technologies
ISCED	international standard classification of education
MoEC	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications
MoER	Ministry of Education and Research
OSKA	<i>Tööjõuvajaduse seire ja oskuste arendamise koordineerimisüsteem</i> labour market needs monitoring and forecasting system
PISA	programme for international student assessment
VET	vocational education and training

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